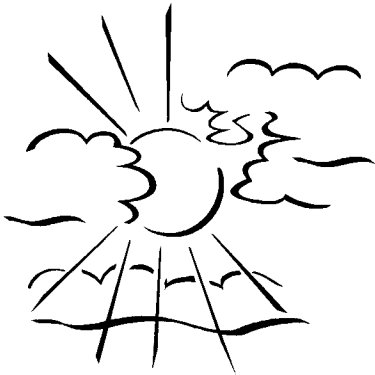


***Department  
of  
Human  
Services***

Prepared by the  
DHS Office of  
Communications  
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# **Articles in Today's Clips**

## **Friday, February 17, 2006**

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
*Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	2-22
*Background Checks	23-24
*Juvenile Justice	25
Foster Care	26-28
Adult Foster Care	29
Early Childhood Development	30-31
Heating Assistance	32
Domestic Violence	33-34
Evacuees	35
Minimum Wage	36

\*Important story at this spot

# Granholm promises investigation into child's death

2/16/2006, 4:26 p.m. ET

By KATHY BARKS HOFFMAN  
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Gov. Jennifer Granholm on Thursday pledged to thoroughly investigate how a 7-year-old boy beaten to death last summer was left with an adoptive family despite repeated reports of abuse.

She also said she won't sign any state Department of Human Services budget bills that don't include the 51 additional caseworkers she has asked for in the budget year that starts Oct. 1. But she had to backtrack Thursday afternoon after first implying the Republican-controlled Legislature had denied her earlier requests for more caseworkers. The governor's office said in a statement that Granholm had not asked for any more caseworkers before her latest budget proposal.

Granholm spokeswoman Liz Boyd said the governor was not trying to point fingers at the Legislature.

"The governor would not use this for political gain," Boyd said. "It should not be used for political gain by anyone. It's much too tragic."

Granholm's earlier comments didn't sit well with Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema.

"To use the horrible tragedy of Ricky Holland's death to score some kind of leverage in budget negotiations is in poor taste and unacceptable," the Wyoming Republican said in a statement.

"The governor has never asked for additional funding for that division in any budget requests until this year. Despite the lack of a request, the Legislature did increase funding two years ago to provide for 14 additional caseworkers."

Ricky Holland disappeared last July 2 from his home in Williamston about 20 miles east of Lansing. His adoptive parents said he'd run away, and a massive hunt was undertaken to try to find him. Police located the boy's remains last month in a rural part of Ingham County.

His adoptive parents are now in jail charged with open counts of murder. They have pleaded not guilty and face a preliminary examination Feb. 28. Court documents show the parents accuse each other of killing Ricky.

Granholm said she plans to look into whether state officials could have done more to protect the boy.

"Believe me, there will be an investigation of what happened," Granholm told reporters Thursday. "If there needs to be corrections, those will be made. And we will get additional resources to make sure all children are protected."

Granholm said the child protective services section is understaffed, one reason she has requested money to hire 51 additional caseworkers in the budget year that starts Oct. 1.

She added that a lot of child protective services caseworkers left state government in the late 1990s when Republican John Engler was governor to take advantage of an early retirement offer.

"Consequently the Department of Human Services personnel have been understaffed for a long period of time," Granholm said. "This year, no budget gets signed unless those resources are there" to hire additional caseworkers.

Figures from the Department of Human Services shows the state currently has 693 child protection caseworkers. It had 705 in the previous budget year.

Also Thursday, the independent state Office of Children's Ombudsman said it has started investigating the Ricky Holland case. The agency will determine whether the Department of Human Services or other child-placing agencies violated any laws, rules or policies. It could make recommendations for changes.

Granholm last month appointed Verlie Ruffin as the children's ombudsman to fill a vacancy. Human Services director Marianne Udow issued a statement Tuesday saying the department is "committed to doing whatever needs to be done to keep children like Ricky and his siblings safe."

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Associated Press reporter David Eggert in Lansing contributed to this report.

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On the Net:

Gov. Jennifer Granholm: <http://www.michigan.gov/gov>

Michigan Department of Human Services: <http://www.michigan.gov/dhs>

# **Number of child protection caseworkers in the past decade**

2/16/2006, 2:51 p.m. ET

The Associated Press

(AP) — The number of state caseworkers assigned to child protection over the past 10 years. Each fiscal year runs from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30.

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_FY 1997 —	601
_FY 1998 —	663
_FY 1999 —	639
_FY 2000 —	698
_FY 2001 —	707
_FY 2002 —	716
_FY 2003 —	717
_FY 2004 —	687
_FY 2005 —	705
_FY 2006 —	693

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Source: Michigan Department of Human Services

## **Oakland County**

# **Hearings for child-protection workers ordered**

## **Judge: Kids aren't being served; Granholm promises probe**

*February 17, 2006*

*By Jack Kresnak*

*Detroit Free Press*

Frustrated by apparent foot-dragging by Department of Human Services foster-care workers managing the care of abused and neglected children, Oakland County's presiding Family Court judge ordered two workers and DHS officials Thursday to appear at hearings to see why they should not be held in contempt of court.

"The agency is charged with the protection of children, and it is failing," Judge James Alexander said. "The agency needs to prioritize, and the No. 1 thing we should do as a state is protect children."

The possible findings of contempt -- which carry penalties of up to 30 days in jail and \$500 in fines -- come as the DHS struggles to defend the way it investigates complaints of child maltreatment and its supervision of about 19,000 children in the foster-care system.

Alexander said he scheduled contempt-of-court hearings for March 2 after he learned Thursday that two families had not received the services he ordered in previous hearings.

In one case, Alexander had ordered psychological counseling in December for two girls ages 10 and 11 whose parents are addicted to drugs and alcohol. On Thursday, Alexander learned from the girls' court-assigned attorney, Zena Isshak, that they had not received any counseling and that the oldest girl, who marked her 12th birthday this week in a foster home, had written a suicide note.

In the other case, Alexander had ordered monthly visits for three siblings -- boys ages 13 and 6, and a 9-year-old girl -- after he terminated their parents' rights to them in September. The oldest boy is in a residential treatment facility, and his siblings live in separate foster homes.

On Thursday, the judge said he learned from the children's attorney, Amy Peterman, that despite his court order, the siblings had visited only twice.

DHS Communications Director Karen Stock said Thursday that "we have a very good relationship with Judge Alexander, and we're very interested in resolving this quickly."

The two foster-care workers are not allowed to speak to the news media, but Alexander said the worker in Peterman's case explained that she had a large caseload and hadn't had time to arrange the visits.

"There is no question that these are difficult jobs that are complicated, and people have a lot of work to do," Stock said. "But in terms of taking care of children, that isn't the right answer."

Stock said Oakland County's human services department is allocated 46 foster-care workers but that there are 10 vacancies. The department is moving to fill the vacancies, but foster-care work is difficult, and it takes time to train workers, she said.

The DHS has been under fire recently after news reports that Child Protective Services in Jackson County had received complaints last year that Tim and Lisa Holland may have been abusing their 7-year-old adopted son, Ricky, in the months before they reported that he had run away.

His remains were found last month in a field in Ingham County, and his parents have been charged with murder.

DHS Director Marianne Udow said her office is reviewing every action by child-abuse investigators involved in the case.

Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings said that until all the facts in the case are in, "everyone should keep an open mind on this."

Gov. Jennifer Granholm also pledged Thursday to find out whether there was anything the state could have done better to protect the boy.

"Believe me, there will be an investigation of what happened," Granholm told reporters Thursday. "If there needs to be corrections, those will be made. And we will get additional resources to make sure all children are protected."

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or [jkresnak@freepress.com](mailto:jkresnak@freepress.com). The Associated Press contributed to this report.

# State to probe Ricky's death

Granholm wants answers in 7-year-old's case; lawmakers call for investigation of abuse charges.

*Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News  
February 17, 2006*

Gov. Jennifer Granholm and some state lawmakers demanded answers Thursday in the death of 7-year-old Ricky Holland.

The boy's adoptive parents are charged with his murder, and court documents show he was left in their care even after state workers knew that Ricky and his siblings were being abused.

The governor vowed to investigate the handling of Ricky's case by the state Department of Human Services and called upon legislators to approve her 2007 budget recommendation, which would add 51 children's protective services workers.

Meanwhile, state representatives David Law, R-Commerce Township, and Rick Baxter, R-Concord, requested that state Children's Ombudsman Berlie Ruffin look into what happened to Ricky. The ombudsman is charged with investigating complaints in Michigan's child welfare system.

Tim Holland, 36, and Lisa Holland, 34, will appear for their preliminary examination on open murder charges Feb. 28 in Mason, the Ingham County seat.

State child protection workers were aware that Ricky and his siblings were being abused, but did not remove them from their home, according to court documents.

Ricky was adopted through the state foster care system, as were Joseph, 4, Kathryn, 3, and Sam, 2. The couple also have a daughter, Allison, 1, who was not adopted.

Sam's adoption was finalized July 21 by Jackson Circuit Court Judge John McBain. Ricky had been reported missing by his parents July 2. His body was found in Ingham County on Jan. 27.

"I want to know why (the court) would allow an adoption to take place when there already are allegations of abuse outstanding on that family," Rep. Law said. "Obviously there was a problem.

"The bottom line is that DHS exists to help protect the very kind of child who was let down in this case." Calls to McBain's office Thursday were not returned.

Liz Boyd, the governor's spokeswoman, said Granholm's 2007 budget recommendation includes \$3.7 million to pay for additional children's protective services workers.

Her total budget for children's services would be roughly equivalent to this year's allocation of \$734.2 million, according to Human Services spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet.

Staff from a Jackson elementary school, which Ricky attended before moving to Williamston in April, told state workers that Ricky showed evidence of food deprivation and intentional and continued humiliation, according to statements made to the court by investigators.

According to a court petition filed by the Department of Human Services, state workers observed signs of physical abuse as recently as January in at least three of the family's surviving children but did not remove them from their parents' care.

The state has not requested that the Hollands' parental rights be terminated, leaving open the possibility that one or both of the parents could regain custody.

Many neighbors say they suspected that Ricky was abused or neglected, and several had called the police or child protection workers to report their suspicions before Ricky's death.

They said the child appeared frail. He sneaked into neighbors' houses in search of food and begged not to be sent home.

*You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or [kbouffard@detnews.com](mailto:kbouffard@detnews.com).*

# Ricky's dad: Suppress statements

Motion claims remarks were to gain plea deal, not to be used as evidence

*By Kevin Grasha  
Lansing State Journal  
February 17, 2006*

Prosecutors have backed out of an agreement to give Tim Holland a plea deal in exchange for information about his 7-year-old son's disappearance and death, Holland's attorney contends.

Those details were provided in a motion filed last week - and obtained by the Lansing State Journal on Thursday - in 55th District Court asking a judge to suppress statements Tim Holland made to police concerning Ricky Holland's death.

But Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III said Thursday evening there was no guarantee of a plea agreement made to Tim Holland in exchange for his statement.

The motion filed by Tim Holland's attorney, Frank Reynolds, contends that after prosecutors came to believe Tim Holland was not being truthful, they rescinded the deal and indicated they plan to use his statements as evidence against him.

Reynolds said prosecutors have not produced any evidence showing his client has been untruthful, according to the documents.

Dunnings disagrees.

"The statements (Tim Holland) made were not completely truthful," he said.

Dunnings would not discuss specifics about conversations leading up to Tim Holland's statement.

Attorneys for Lisa Holland have filed a similar motion to suppress Tim Holland's statements, which also implicate their client.

Tim and Lisa Holland, of Williamston, face open murder charges in the death of their son.

Lawyers were supposed to present arguments on the motion Thursday before Judge Rosemarie Aquilina; the hearing was adjourned until Tuesday.

Ricky was reported missing July 2, sparking a massive search. On Jan. 27, Tim Holland led police to the boy's body, according to police and court records.

Tim Holland's statements to police that day - which were partially revealed this week in a court transcript - described how Lisa Holland killed their son by striking him with a hammer. He also told police he disposed of the body at his wife's direction.

In an interview the preceding day, Lisa Holland told police it was Tim Holland who killed their son.

Lisa Holland's attorney Mike Nichols said suppressing Tim Holland's statements likely would not deal a huge blow to the prosecution.

"It's not going to be a home-run swing," he said. "It's about fairness. We don't want statements put into evidence without the opportunity to cross-examine the person who made them."

Also Thursday, defense attorneys for Lisa Holland wrangled with prosecutors over evidence they said they haven't received - part of the discovery process in criminal cases.

"Defense attorneys are never happy with the speed evidence is turned over," said attorney Andrew Abood, who also represents Lisa Holland.

Evidence they seek includes documents and photographs from Ricky's autopsy, videotaped statements made by Tim and Lisa Holland, and records relating to the Department of Human Services' investigation into the Hollands.

Dr. Dean Sienko, Ingham County medical examiner, reiterated Thursday he has not determined Ricky's cause of death.

"I have not reached any conclusions," he said. "All of this is still under investigation."

Family members of Tim Holland said Thursday they have requested Ricky's remains through the Ingham County Sheriff's Office.

No funeral arrangements have yet been made.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or [kgrasha@lsj.com](mailto:kgrasha@lsj.com).

**Hearings**



- Preliminary hearings for Tim and Lisa Holland, which will determine if there is enough evidence to advance their cases to trial, are scheduled for Feb. 28. They face charges of open murder.

# **Granholm Investigates Boy's Beating Death**

## ***Adopted Parents Face Murder Charges***

POSTED: 3:34 pm EST February 16, 2006

Gov. Jennifer Granholm on Thursday pledged to thoroughly investigate how a 7-year-old boy beaten to death last summer was left with an adoptive family despite repeated reports of abuse. Ricky Holland's adoptive parents are in jail charged with open counts of murder. They have pleaded not guilty and face a preliminary examination Feb. 28. Court documents show the parents accuse each other of killing Ricky (pictured).

Granholm said she plans to look into whether state officials could have done more to protect the boy.

"Believe me, there will be an investigation of what happened," Granholm told reporters Thursday. "If there needs to be corrections, those will be made. And we will get additional resources to make sure all children are protected."

Granholm said the child protective services section is understaffed, one reason she has requested money to hire 51 additional caseworkers in the budget year that starts Oct. 1. She said she has submitted budgets in the past requesting more caseworkers, but the Republican-controlled Legislature has stripped out the extra positions.

She added that a lot of child protective services caseworkers left state government in the late 1990s when Republican John Engler was governor to take advantage of an early retirement offer. "Consequently the Department of Human Services personnel have been understaffed for a long period of time," Granholm said. "This year, no budget gets signed unless those resources are there" to hire additional caseworkers.

## Gov's Case Worker Comments Cause Flap

Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** told reporters early Thursday that she had made repeated requests in the past to the Republican legislature to beef up the ranks of Child Protective Service case workers, but when the Senate Republican Leader called her on it, the governor's office recanted.

The story unfolded when the governor was asked this morning if she was concerned that the budget cuts at the Department of Human Services (DHS) may have contributed in some way to the death of 7-year-old Ricky **HOLLAND** of Williamston, who was allegedly killed in July by his adoptive parents.

*The Detroit News* reported Monday that Children's Protective Services (CPS) workers observed signs of physical abuse among Ricky's surviving siblings as recently as January. Ricky and three of his four siblings were adopted through the state foster care system. Questions have since been raised about whether the state should have acted sooner in removing the kids.

Granholm indicated this morning that she requested 51 additional caseworkers in the new budget and promised a complete investigation into the death while reassuring everyone that her administration was committed to protecting young children.

The governor also noted that there was an early out retirement program that depleted the CPS ranks. She said it had been "understaffed for a long period of time" and "we've repeatedly asked for additional resources." Without saying it, the clear implication to reporters was that the GOP legislature had not fulfilled the requests.

When Senate Majority Leader Ken **SIKKEMA** (R-Wyoming) got wind of the story on the *Associated Press*, he fired off a memo saying, "The governor made two mistakes today, both in fact and judgment. To use the horrible tragedy of Ricky Holland's death to score some kind of leverage in budget negotiations is in poor taste and unacceptable."

Then he pointed out that the Republicans added 14 additional caseworkers two years ago "despite the lack of a request" from the Granholm administration. And to drive home the point that the governor was wrong, he added, "The governor has never asked for additional funding for that division in any budget requests until this year."

With the release of that, Press Secretary Liz **BOYD** was on the phone to reporters to concede that the governor had gotten it wrong in the morning exchange.

That was followed by this statement later on:

"While the Granholm Administration has taken a number of steps to protect Michigan's children, the administration has not asked for additional resources for Child Protective Services in the past."

Then seemingly in response to Sikkema's comment about scoring some leverage, the statement from the executive office concluded, "The administration believes that this is a matter that should not be used for political gain and looks forward to working with the Legislature on the DHS budget."

The governor earlier told reporters that no DHS budget would be signed this year without the additional

money for caseworkers in it.

In related news, Rep. David **LAW** (R-Commerce Twp.) and Rep. Rick **BAXTER** (R-Jackson) issued a request to the Children's Ombudsman to review the child abuse case of Holland and issue a report by Mar. 1.

Law apparently had been investigating child abuse early last year after a Detroit newspaper published complaints from the Oakland County Prosecutor's office that CPS' policy of leaving children in abusive situations was putting the lives of children in jeopardy.

"We understand that this is a complex case, made more difficult by an ongoing criminal investigation. However, a number of Michigan legislators have expressed concern that children are falling through the cracks every day and believe immediate action by the Legislature may be necessary," the letter reads.

*(Contributed by Senior Capital Correspondent Tim **SKUBICK**.)*

## Re-evaluate guidelines for removing children But don't abandon attempt to preserve troubled families

The horrible death of 7-year-old Ricky Holland, brutally beaten and discarded in a ditch, is once again calling into question the ability of the state of Michigan to protect children from abusive parents.

And it should. Ricky was very much in the system. Child welfare workers had visited the home, investigated reports of abuse, and yet Ricky was left with his parents, who are suspects in his murder.

Michigan's Department of Human Services follows a policy it calls Families First, which places a priority on keeping families together, even after incidents of child abuse.

Families where abuse has occurred or is suspected are given special services to guard against future incidents and avoid having the child or children removed from the home.

Ricky's death should not serve as an indictment of the Families First approach, although it should raise red flags about how the policy is administered.

The Families First program has had some success in protecting children, while keeping them at home. National research indicates it is effective in keeping children from being unnecessarily separated from their parents. Michigan Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow notes that the state removes about 7 percent of children from their homes.

But the program has to be administered with the utmost care. The ultimate goal is not keeping families together, but keeping children from being harmed.

Udow says her agency is re-evaluating its policies and examining the "triggers" that tell social workers when to pull children out of dangerous situations. Ricky's death indicates that that review is clearly needed.

But simply abandoning the policy of trying to maintain families will not guarantee there will be no more cases like Ricky Holland.

The need in Michigan overwhelms the state's resources. There are about 19,000 children in foster care alone. Last year, Child Protective Services workers investigated 72,286 complaints involving children. They substantiated 16,889. According to Udow, about 11,000 involved serious abuse. The number of investigations has increased by 23 percent since 1996.

If all children who are in questionable situations were removed from their homes, the system would be overwhelmed. There simply aren't enough foster homes available.

The breakdown of the parental infrastructure in the state has resulted in an ever-increasing workload for social workers, while resources committed to child welfare have declined.

But even with more workers and more money, it would be impossible for the state to protect all children from the growing number of evil and ignorant parents. As long as mean, stupid people keep having children, there will be more Ricky Hollands in Michigan.

February 17, 2006

## Editorials

*Detroit Free Press*

### ***Child Protection***

## Stop political blame games; work to prevent abuse

Ricky Holland deserved better than he got in life. In death, he deserves better than to become the latest subject of the endless political bickering in Lansing. The state does not have enough Child Protective Services workers, and even adding the 51 that Gov. Jennifer Granholm has proposed in her latest budget isn't going to dramatically change that fact.

Democrat Granholm and leaders of the Republican-controlled Legislature can argue ad nauseam about who's more to blame, but that will make not a whit of difference to Ricky Holland or any kids like him. What will matter is preventing another tragedy like Ricky by finding ways to really increase the protective part of Protective Services.

"The agency is charged with the protection of children, and it is failing," Judge James Alexander of Oakland County Family Court declared Thursday in scheduling a hearing to determine whether the state Department of Human Services, which includes CPS, should be held in contempt of court for not providing two families with services the judge had ordered. "The agency needs to prioritize, and the number one thing we should do as a state is protect children."

That sure beats arguing about who's to blame because we don't. Everybody ought to just pipe down about the Holland case while the criminal justice system deals with Ricky's adoptive parents and the Department of Human Services and state Children's Ombudsman complete investigations to determine whether the state could or should have done anything differently.

Ricky, 7, was reported missing last summer from his adoptive family's home in Williamston. His skeletal remains were found a month ago in a field, and his adoptive parents have been charged with murder. Court records show each accuses the other of killing the boy and that several reports had been made to CPS that Ricky was being abused.

Commenting on the tragedy, Granholm had to backtrack Thursday after first saying that the Legislature had denied her earlier requests for more CPS caseworkers. Actually, she hadn't asked for any, which Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema pointed out in his own statement, noting that the Legislature added money for 14 caseworkers two years ago.

Sikkema: "To use the horrible tragedy of Ricky Holland's death to score some kind of leverage in budget negotiations is in poor taste and unacceptable."

Granholm spokesman Liz Boyd: "The governor would not use this for political gain. It should not be used for political gain by anyone. It's much too tragic."

If he could, Ricky Holland would certainly agree.

## **Letters to the editor**

### **FROM OUR READERS: Don't blame state for killing**

*February 17, 2006*

*Detroit Free Press*

I am tired of hearing that criminal acts are the fault of the state, the school district or anybody else other than the actual perpetrators ("Boy's death leads to inquiry," Feb. 15). The fact is that the Department of Human Services does not have the financial and personnel resources to battle the immense amount of legal red tape required to intervene in reported abuse cases.

An even harder fact is that taxpayers are unwilling to provide the necessary resources or truly to allow such intervention liberties. It's easy to point out other people we'd like to see dealt with, but would you really want the state to be able just to swoop in on your family?

There are only two people at blame for Ricky Holland's abuse and death: his unwilling and uncaring adoptive parents. Of course, that position implies personal responsibility, a foreign concept in our modern litigious era.

**Howard I. Goldman**

*Farmington Hills*

### **No more excuses for children**

Michigan's children are in peril. Each year, through Child's Hope, the child abuse prevention organization for out-Wayne County, we provide hundreds of teachers with information on how to report suspected child abuse to Protective Services. And they explain to me all the reasons why they find it a futile practice, when, all too often, nothing is done.

The Feb. 15 article "Boy's death leads to inquiry" is another example of how we need to truly provide help to children -- not just a law and lip service. A little boy is dead, and the director of Michigan Human Services responds that "we are committed to doing whatever needs to be done to keep children like Ricky and his siblings safe."

The time is now. Let's get going before another child suffers silently at the hands of an abuser and, silently -- because funds are short, resources are tight, or whatever -- at the hands of a state. Let's work together, proactively, to show our children that they count in Michigan.

**Judith S. Hoeffler**

*Executive Director, Child's Hope*

*Dearborn*

### **Questionable adoption criteria**

I am heartbroken over the brutal murder of Ricky Holland, and I can't help but wonder how the Hollands were able to adopt four children while others who try to adopt and who have so much more to offer a child come up empty.

Last year, a family member and his wife tried to adopt a child through the state's foster system, but the judge ruled that the child should live with her grandmother, who had a history of drug abuse and a poor track record for parenting. Apparently, this judge felt it would be better for a child to live with a less-than-desirable guardian who is blood-related than to be raised by adoptive parents who could have offered the child a fine home and a good education.

I hope there will be a thorough investigation into the criteria used to determine who can adopt a child. I also hope the state will mandate continued follow-ups on finalized adoptions for a longer period of time.

**Janice Fritz-Ryken**

*Livonia*



# Dad guilty in child's death

Friday, February 17, 2006

By Steven Hepker  
shepker@citpat.com -- 768-4923

A jury Thursday convicted a Jackson father of murdering his 14-month-old daughter. Circuit Judge Chad Schmucker will sentence Shawndale Clark to a mandatory life sentence on March 22.

The jury deliberated about seven hours, rendering its verdict at 3 p.m. It found Clark guilty of felony murder, manslaughter and first-degree child abuse.

Manslaughter and felony murder are not compatible.

"I am surprised by the inconsistencies in the verdict," defense attorney George Lyons said. "On one hand, they are saying it was unintentional, and on the other they say it is intentional. But the law allows juries to make inconsistent verdicts."

The grandparents of Amaree Gail Mathis and Clark's family, sitting on opposite sides throughout the four-day trial, sobbed at the verdict.

But there was elation amid the sadness for Don and Cynthia Mathis.

"We are ecstatic at the verdict," Don Mathis, Amaree's maternal grandfather, said. "We never for one minute thought this was an accident."

The baby's mother, Jacqueline Mathis, showed little emotion, leaving the court quickly. She testified for the prosecution on Tuesday, mostly in support of Clark.

She had asked Clark to leave the mother of another of his children to move in with her a week before Amaree died of blunt trauma to her head.

After the toddler died, she said she believed Clark's account that her daughter must have fallen and struck her head.

"She doesn't want to believe she left her baby with someone who could do such a thing," Don Mathis said.

Two pathologists who testified for the prosecution said the injuries to the child's brain could not have been caused by a slip against the bathtub, as Clark suggested. A pathologist for the defense said short falls can cause fatal injuries.

The jury rejected a charge of second-degree murder. It decided Clark was guilty of child abuse, which is the underlying felony for the felony murder conviction.

Investigators speculated Clark either struck the child or bashed her head against a hard surface while the mother was at work or at a bar with friends.

# Anger flows at killer's sentencing

Friday, February 17, 2006

By John Agar  
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A day after adopting his 5-year-old grandson, Tom Friar confronted the man who killed the boy's mother and sister.

"The look on your face. ... you just don't understand," Friar told Terrill Bird on Thursday. "It's despicable what you did. It's filth like you that has to get off the street."

Friar did not expect Bird to understand his family's loss. Bird showed up for his sentencing hearing, smiling briefly, his hair in pigtails like Mickey Mouse ears. He was ordered to spend the rest of his life behind bars, and Friar's only hope was that prisoners would not look kindly on a child-killer.

"You're the perfect example of why there should be a death sentence," Friar told Bird.

Bird was convicted earlier this month of first-degree murder in the April 2005 stabbing death of Melissa Friar, 27, and the suffocation of her daughter Alana, 8. He was convicted of kidnapping Jonathon Friar, then 4, and leaving him overnight in freezing temperatures on the porch of a vacant house.

The prosecution says Bird spared the boy, his nephew and the son of his brother, Shannon Bell. Bell was not charged in the killing, but the victims' family believes others were involved. No clear motive was established at trial, but proof of motive is not needed for conviction.

Tom Friar urged Bird to "do one thing in your life right, and tell the police why, and who helped you do this."

Melissa Bird was stabbed 45 times at her house at 227 Carrier St. NE, while her daughter was left in the bathroom with a plastic bag over her head. Police say the boy, who was too traumatized to testify, witnessed both killings.

Bird, who testified he happened upon the killings after a botched drug rip-off, declined to speak in court. His attorney, Donald Pebley, said only that "my client maintains his innocence."

Kent County Circuit Judge Dennis Leiber imposed mandatory sentences of life in prison without parole for the two first-degree murder charges, life for kidnapping and a lesser term for auto theft.

The victims' families, who attended every day of trial, were relieved to put the court hearings behind them. But they would return if other suspects are charged.

Eric Friar, whose sister and niece were killed, said afterward his family has been strong for Jonathon. His parents, Ruth and Tom Friar, officially adopted the boy on Wednesday.

He said he and his dad, along with Kareem Adegbeye, the father of Alana, would help raise Jonathon. He called the two "some of the strongest men I know."

Adegbeye said Bird deserved the sentence, but it did not ease the pain.

"It doesn't change anything," he said. "Lanie's still gone. Melissa's still gone."

In court, he called the killings "so heinous and despicable," but said Bird's demeanor suggested he didn't care.

"What do I say to the person who took away my beautiful girl, Alana?" he said. "How about I tell you how much good they could have done for the world? My daughter, Alana, was destined to help people."

He wiped tears, and said: "She was not only beautiful on the outside, she was also beautiful within. She was the most loving person I ever knew. ... It's a sad world because of people like you. You took away a huge part of our lives."

# **Man gets three to 15 years for sexually abusing 6-year-old girl**

Jackson Citizen Patriot

Friday, February 17, 2006

A father stood and sobbed for five minutes Thursday as he tried to convey to Circuit Judge Edward Grant the anguish of knowing his daughter was sexually abused.

"Why? She's just a little girl," he said, standing a few feet from the man who twice performed sex acts on his 6-year-old daughter. "For him to do what he did was despicable, a disgrace to me and my family."

Geemes E. Hamilton, 37, pleaded guilty to second-degree criminal sexual conduct.

State guidelines calling for a minimum of 0-17 months were inadequate, Grant said. A man who has consensual sex with an underage girl could get the same sentence.

"You are 37! She's 6!" Grant roared. Hamilton plotted alone time with the girl and then performed acts she later described to her parents and police.

Grant exceeded the guidelines, sentencing Hamilton to three to 15 years in prison.

# Sex assault case widens

Friday, February 17, 2006

LaNIA COLEMAN  
THE SAGINAW NEWS

CLARE -- A second person has come forward in a sexual assault case against a 50-year-old Clare County man.

Michael J. Tossey, a registered sex offender, remained jailed on a \$250,000 cash or surety bond on multiple charges of criminal sexual conduct involving a 15-year-old student.

Clare Police Officer Alan White, liaison officer with Clare Public Schools, said investigators are working on a second case and could request that prosecutors authorize an additional warrant today.

The investigation began Feb. 10 when White found a letter on his desk when he arrived at the high school.

The envelope contained "an absolutely heart-wrenching letter" from a student describing more than a year of sexual abuse and implicating Tossey, White said.

The abuse involved "a variety of things," the officer said.

"This student hadn't felt she could go to anyone else," he said. "She felt trapped and didn't know what else to do. She asked for help and thus started an odyssey. It was like tipping over a domino."

By Monday afternoon, White and a state police detective from the Mount Pleasant Post felt they had assembled sufficient probable cause to arrest Tossey.

White said the abuse likely would continue if not for the bond he has forged with the students.

"I've worked with these kids since they were kindergartners," he said. "They all know me."

"This kind of thing (sexual abuse) happens, and everyone seems to think it's happening more and more. But before there were school liaison officers, young people had no relationship with cops, so they had no one to go to."

"I don't think these cases are on the increase. They're just reported more."

# **Rabideau back in Bay County for arraignment today**

Friday, February 17, 2006

By TIM YOUNKMAN  
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

Fugitive Catholic priest John Steven Rabideau, 44, charged with having sex with children, is to face a Bay County District Court arraignment today.

Rabideau was transported late Thursday to Bay City by Michigan State Police detectives, taking him from the Dade County Jail where he had been incarcerated since being apprehended last month in Bogota, Colombia.

Bay County Prosecutor Joseph K. Sheeran said Rabideau, a Midland native who had fled the country after charges were filed in 1998, was associated with the religious order Oblates of the Virgin Mary in Boston and was a seminarian when the crimes took place in the Auburn area between 1985 and 1987. The three victims, who came forward in 1998, were between the ages of 6 and 14.

Rabideau was taken by federal authorities from Colombia without extradition because of agreements between the two countries during the war on drugs, officials said. He was taken by federal agents to Miami where he has been held pending extradition to Bay County.

He faces a maximum penalty of life in prison if convicted of the charges which include first-degree criminal sexual conduct and six counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct.

His arraignment is set for 2:30 p.m. today.

- Tim Younkman covers area police news and courts for The Times. He can be reached at 894-9652 or by e-mail at [tyounkman@bc-times.com](mailto:tyounkman@bc-times.com).

## **Slow down: Before e-mailing sex-offender list to residents, ensure its accuracy**

A Lansing State Journal editorial

The Michigan Legislature seems anxious to have state residents notified quickly if a sex offender moves into their community. A fine idea - in theory.

But history has shown that these sex-offender lists are only as valuable as the accuracy of the information they contain. Michigan's sex-offender registry, for example, has had an inglorious history filled with inaccurate, misleading or incomplete information.

So if the Legislature really wants to assist Michigan residents with identifying sex offenders in their midst, it ought to first insist that the state create a consistently accurate list.

The House on Wednesday passed legislation that would notify state residents by e-mail when a sex offender moves into their ZIP code. The Senate has already passed similar legislation, so it could soon be headed to Gov. Jennifer Granholm's desk. She's indicated she would sign the bill.

We have no doubt that this would be popular. Its value, though, needs to be rigorously questioned.

Let's review. When Michigan's sex-offender registry was first made available to the public in 1996, it was quickly and correctly assailed for its inaccuracy. It was riddled with obsolete information that rendered its believability as next to zero.

Fast forward to 2005. That's when the Michigan State Police had to report that thousands of people on the sex-offender registry were "missing"; that is, they weren't living at the addresses the registry said they were. It turned out that more than 8,000 offenders weren't obeying the law that required them to alert the state when they moved to a new address.

Similarly, the state is currently catching flak for issuing inaccurate lists of convicted felons working in Michigan schools. A federal judge ruled Tuesday that the lists must be recalled because some people were falsely accused of being convicted felons.

Having such lists available to the public is important. But in its haste to make the lists readily accessible, the state shouldn't forsake accuracy.

It will take more money - which state leaders so far have decided not to spend. But Michiganians deserve a sex-offender list that is not simply easy to get, but worth the paper its printed on.

# School 'convict' list: Time to get it right

Friday, February 17, 2006

State lawmakers passed a good law last summer, one intended to purge schools of sex offenders who might pose a threat to students. But it has become clear that an "authoritative" list of school employees with 4,600 criminal offenses in their past was riddled with errors.

So how did such a flawed list come about? A new law requires school districts to fire employees previously convicted of sex offenses, but no firing would take place without fingerprint verification. To comply, the Michigan Department of Education began last summer comparing its list of all school employees with a State Police database.

If employees were found to have a criminal sexual offense or offense against a child in their past, action was initiated immediately.

However, under new School Safety laws that took effect in January, school districts were also to be notified by the state of employees with any criminal convictions.

When the state sent the lists out to all the districts, it became clear that the broader list had many errors.

For example, here in Jackson County, Jamie Maxson of Grass Lake's George Long Elementary School was identified on the list as having been convicted of a 1976 felony -- receiving and concealing. It wasn't her. In fact, in 1976 her last name wasn't even Maxson, since that was before her marriage to Bruce, a respected ex-Grass Lake Township supervisor.

Concerns about the errors led to a temporary restraining order earlier this week by U.S. District Judge Paul Gadola. Not only is the state restrained from releasing the full list, but the state Departments of Education and State Police must recall all copies of the list.

In retrospect, the state failed miserably in creating the list and ensuring its accuracy. State School Superintendent Mike Flanagan explained why: "We expected that local school districts would be the final ... filter to identify school employees with criminal convictions." So a list his department knew was flawed was sent to districts, where havoc ensued. News organizations rightfully expected the information to be made public. But verification of the list was incomplete.

This week the Legislature began trying to rectify the problem. State Rep. Rick Baxter, R-Concord, won unanimous passage by the Education Committee Wednesday of a bill requiring certain steps to ensure accuracy of the school list. His bill also bars release of records under Freedom of Information Act request for 14 days after its receipt by a local school district.

The Baxter bill offers some security to employees by giving local districts 14 days to deal with erroneous listings before public release. That's good. However, the measure may be too restrictive in limiting public release to felony convictions and only those misdemeanors involving sexual or physical abuse.

There may be other misdemeanors of interest, such as drunken driving if it involves a bus driver. Any crime that touches on student safety should be open to public scrutiny. Just because two state departments couldn't get a reliable report out, it doesn't mean we should restrict access to relevant information.

--The Jackson Citizen Patriot



# More cases of abuse at Highfields, state says

## Ingham cancels payments to troubled facility

*By T.M. Shultz  
Lansing State Journal  
February 17, 2006*

The state substantiated more incidents of abuse over the past two years at Highfields, Ingham County commissioners learned Thursday before they canceled payments to the center.

Beginning today, Ingham County will no longer pay Highfields Inc. - an Onondaga facility where troubled boys receive court-ordered treatment - \$160,437 a month for 24 beds.

That decision came on the heels of Ingham County family court judges' removing 18 youngsters Tuesday after receiving two recent reports of staff members mistreating boys.

On Thursday, Travis Faulds, director of juvenile services for the court, told commissioners that 13 additional allegations against Highfields employees involving youngsters from several counties had surfaced.

Seven were substantiated by the state Department of Human Services; some involved physical and mental abuse, Faulds said.

Highfields President Jim Hines defended the facility's mostly positive record. "We work with some difficult individuals," he told the committee. "That means we must work hard and well."

That doesn't excuse improper staff behavior, he said.

It would be unlawful for the county to continue paying Highfields because no Ingham youngsters are being served there now, county attorney John McGlinchey and Deputy Controller John Neilsen told the county board Thursday. Recent allegations include taking a boy outside improperly clothed, and a boy being threatened or assaulted by other boys in a shower area. The state and Ingham County Sheriff's Office are investigating.

Court officials say the charges are "very serious," and they will no longer send children to Highfields unless drastic changes are made at all management levels.

Faulds said that in the past 48 hours, the court has received at least four additional allegations of abuse at Highfields. Highfields' internal investigation was completed Thursday, but Hines said he would not release the results until he's had time to notify his staff.

Twenty-four youngsters remain at Highfields in other programs from other counties.

Highfields' total annual budget is \$6.5 million to \$7 million. Losing \$2 million will have serious financial consequences for the facility, Hines said, but it will not close. Instead, arrangements are being made to fill the empty Ingham County beds with youngsters from other statewide programs.

Contact T.M. Shultz at 377-1061 or [tshultz@lsj.com](mailto:tshultz@lsj.com).

### Investigations

- The Ingham County Sheriff's Office is investigating whether Highfields staff committed any crimes.
- The state Department of Human Services has two investigations; both will determine whether Highfields is following the terms of its state license and its contract with the county.
- Highfields completed its internal investigation Thursday.

# Welfare Agencies Seek Foster Children's Assets

By ERIK ECKHOLM  
The New York Times

Published: February 17, 2006

GREENSBORO, N.C. — In 2004, at the age of 14 and at his own desperate request, John G. became a ward of North Carolina.

His mother abandoned him for crack when he was 3, and his adoptive father died of cancer a year later. A succession of guardians beat him, made him sell drugs and refused to buy him toys. When he finally arrived at a county-financed group residence, he was wearing outgrown clothes. On the plus side, he was receiving Social Security survivor benefits and he held title to a modest house, willed to him by the adoptive father 10 years earlier and an asset that might give him traction, or at least a place to live, when he "ages out" of foster care at 18.

Now, the fate of the house — and the insistence of Guilford County officials on taking all of John's Social Security benefits to help pay for his foster care — are at the center of a legal battle with potential repercussions around the country.

The dispute is the latest in a continuing struggle between children's advocates and money-starved welfare agencies. They are wrestling over the proper use of more than \$100 million in Social Security benefits that the states are taking on behalf of foster children with disabilities or a dead or disabled natural parent.

Determined to extract as much federal aid for social programs as the law will permit, some state welfare agencies even hire private companies, working for contingency fees, to help them reap more federal money by identifying foster children who are eligible for Social Security benefits. The money is then routinely used to help offset the cost of foster care.

Advocates for children question the wholesale takeover of money, accusing agencies of repaying themselves for care they are obligated to provide and of failing to use the windfall to meet children's individual needs, whether extra tutoring or counseling or, as in John's case, something more unusual.

Guilford County officials refused to release any of John's money, even when they learned that his last guardian had stopped making the \$221 monthly mortgage payments on his house and that he faced its imminent loss. A local court has ordered the county to make payments for now, but the county has appealed and said it might appeal to the United States Supreme Court if necessary.

For John, who as a foster child may not be fully identified, it was clear as he visited the house recently that it represented not just money but also a precious link to his troubled past and an unknown future.

"This is my childhood," John, now 15, said as he climbed through a broken window to explore the boarded-up structure for the first time since he fled it two years ago. On the floor of the bedroom, he found a brown teddy bear and clung to it, saying softly, "My mother gave this to me before she left."

John has no idea how he will support himself, but he wants to live in the house he inherited, a property valued at \$80,000. "It will be a good place to be," he said.

John's court-appointed volunteer protector found out about the threat to his house and enlisted a Legal Aid lawyer to help him fight for it.

"For the state to pocket a child's money and allow his home to go into foreclosure just doesn't make sense," said his Legal Aid lawyer, Lewis Pitts. "No one can say it's in the best interests of the child."

The benefits that states routinely take include both Supplemental Security Income, or S.S.I., and other Social Security money for children whose parents have died or are disabled. The payments are often close to \$600 a month, and usually end when children reach 18 or 21.

"The practice is not the result of deliberative policy discussions regarding how to best serve children in foster care," said Daniel L. Hatcher, a law professor at the University of Baltimore who is the author of an article on the subject that is to be published in *The Cardozo Law Review*. "It is simply an ad hoc reaction by underfunded state agencies."

"The Social Security benefits are treated as a funding stream," Mr. Hatcher said, rather than as an opportunity to provide any special services or to give children savings for the perilous months after they turn 18, when many fall into crime or homelessness.

A Supreme Court decision in 2003, overturning a decision by courts in Washington State, affirmed that states could legally use children's Social Security benefits to offset current "maintenance costs." But it did not address a deeper question: does that always serve the child's "best interests," as federal rules require, or the longer-term interests of the public for that matter? In the case of John G., a Guilford County district court ruled last Dec. 29 that the state must pay up the mortgage and cover repairs so the house could be saved for the youth. Reviewing John's rough history and uncertain prospects, Judge Susan E. Bray declared that "any reasonable person would see the fiscal wisdom" of helping him keep the property.

The county has appealed to a higher state court, arguing that the state courts have no jurisdiction over the matter, that the county is legally entitled to use John's benefits to cover his care and that it has no responsibility to exhaust public resources so a child can own property.

"The federal regulations say that the funds are to be used for current needs and expenses," said Lynne Shifton, an assistant county attorney. "His house payments are not, in our opinion, to meet his current needs."

For now, the county must pay up the arrears on John's house and for needed repairs. A private group hopes to rent it as a transition home for foster children until John is able to move in. State governments around the country stoutly defend their use of foster children's benefits.

Twenty-six states filed a supporting brief to the Supreme Court in the 2003 Washington case, noting that the practice had been approved by the Social Security Administration and arguing that barring it "could leave the states in a position of economic peril."

If states cannot devote money to current care, the brief added, children will ultimately suffer because the states will not help eligible children sign up for benefits.

Many advocates for children agree with that point: preserving an incentive to enroll more children is good for them because the benefits will continue if the child is adopted or returns to his birth family.

"If you tinker seriously with incentives of the child welfare agency, you can wind up doing a lot of harm," said Bruce Boyer, director of the child law clinic at Loyola University in Chicago.

Mr. Boyer led a lawsuit that stopped Illinois from using benefits to cover, in addition to direct care expenses, the overhead costs of foster agencies.

Mr. Boyer said state governments had an inherent conflict of interest, serving as creditors trying to recoup the cost of their programs and also as trustees of children's money. As a first step, he

said, agencies should try harder to find relatives or volunteers to serve as official recipients of benefits.

A new law in California, passed with the support of advocates for children, requires counties to evaluate each foster child for Social Security eligibility. But it also demands new scrutiny of how benefits are used and modest savings to help aging-out children become independent.

"We are moving toward an individualized system, requiring counties to stop and think about the child at every stage of the process — in choosing a payee, determining how to spend the money, and accounting for how the funds are spent," said Angie Schwartz, a lawyer at the National Center for Youth Law in Oakland, Calif.

During John G.'s recent visit to his house, it became clear that the property may offer John more than shelter.

Its yard overgrown, its front plastered with a "condemned" poster because the utilities were cut off, the vacant house is an eyesore in a tidy cul-de-sac of similar homes, all built by Habitat for Humanity.

But neighbors poured forth with hugs and joy when John showed up unexpectedly and said that he hoped to move back.

"He's had it real tough, but he's a good kid," said a mother from across the street.

As he left to return to his foster home — he has recently moved from the group facility to a private home — John vowed that he would return to the house in a few weeks, to mow the lawn.

# Why meddle with group home rules?

Tuesday, February 17, 2006

From The Jackson Citizen-Patriot

Michigan's Department of Human Services is proposing new administrative rules for an industry that cares for 50,000-plus state residents. But are the proposed rules intended to help patients -- or unionize 5,000 adult foster care and home-for-the-aged facilities?

Opposition to the change has been mounting since last summer, when the rules were first proposed. The political fat hit the fire recently when Senate Republicans introduced legislation to stop the Granholm administration from imposing the rules. ...

Under the legislation, lawmakers would bar practices that grant preferences to health occupations with collective bargaining. Here are two examples of these too-zealous rules:

Under the proposed rules, "A home shall provide its direct-care employees with compensation and benefits necessary to attract and retain a sufficient number of qualified direct-care employees to provide for the protection, health, safety and welfare of residents."

How will the state measure compliance with this nebulous wage-benefit requirement?

Here's the offending language: "A collective bargaining agreement with direct-care employees of the home resulting from participation of the home in multi-employer collective-bargaining activities ... shall be deemed by the department as sufficient evidence that the home is in compliance with this subrule."

Yes, this says in effect that the home has met this standard if it is a unionized work place. If not, presumably the issue is arguable along the lines of what is "necessary to attract and retain sufficient" employees.

The proposed rules also would permit the state to establish a direct-care staff registry of individuals eligible to work in group homes and homes for the aged. This registry would include name, address, phone number and Social Security numbers, age, date of birth and employment record -- including reasons for leaving.

The information is pertinent for employers -- but it strikes us as overreaching for the state's needs. Unless, that is, the intent is to allow unions access to the information for purposes of organizing. Since operators of the homes say the information would be public information, available with a Freedom of Information Act request, that is a valid concern. ...

Common sense dictates that when you're in a hole and can't get out, you don't dig the hole deeper. Michigan is in an economic hole. This sort of rules-making, detached from economic reality, is just what the state doesn't need, for it would add expense to an entire industry.

Preferably, the state should moderate its intrusive rules and focus instead on rules that would actually improve life for the home residents.

Failing that, the Senate legislation deserves favorable consideration.

# **HELPING KIDS HELPS ADULTS: Head Start changes lives in Detroit, but services threatened**

February 17, 2006

BY CHASTITY PRATT  
FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITER

Joan Scales has a stack of letters an inch thick about the Head Start program she runs in Detroit. A father wrote saying he is thankful that Scales started the state's only all-male preschool. A woman said she got her first real job, as an assistant Head Start teacher, after shaking off a 15-year drug addiction.

Head Start is not simply free preschool for poor children. It also serves the emotional, social and health needs of entire families.

The Southeast Children and Family Development's programs have helped pull mothers off of welfare to become community leaders, made teachers out of parolees and counselors out of drug addicts.

Many of those who pamper infants, cook the meals or otherwise keep the programs running -- including Scales, who runs 19 programs on the east side -- are former low-income parents who found purpose and a livelihood with help from Head Start.

But despite stories of how Head Start has helped people in the community, as many as 7,500 children and their families and hundreds of employees citywide could lose services and jobs if Detroit's Department of Human Services doesn't clean up financial management violations and under-enrollment issues by April.

"We are currently in conversations with Administration for Children and Families, and preparing to communicate with our delegate agencies and policy council about our proposed plans to improve the Head Start program," Shenetta Coleman, director of the Detroit Department of Human Services, said in a statement Wednesday.

"Once our plan is finalized and approved, details will be made available."

Head Start serves the needs of 3- and 4-year-olds and their families. Early Head Start serves pregnant mothers and infants from birth to 2 1/2 years.

The Early Head Start program for infants includes a male and female teacher in nearly every class to model the traditional family structure many children don't have at home, Scales said. Staff members also make home visits and give parents a daily report on their child's progress.

"We deal with the entire family," Scales said. "Our objective is to break the chain of poverty."

Scales said the most frustrating part of Head Start is that the need is great but the funding is not. Citywide, 14,442 children are eligible for Head Start, but roughly half that number actually attend the eight agencies that run Head Start in Detroit. Just 95 infants and toddlers are enrolled in Early Head Start, although 17,579 are eligible, according to data from the Michigan Federal Register Eligibility Disk.

"We need more money, not less, because every child who is eligible should be able to have this," Scales said. "It works, it works, it works."

A 40-year High/Scope Educational Research Foundation study of former preschool students in Ypsilanti found that for every \$1 invested in quality early childhood education, the societal

benefit was \$17. Adults who went through quality preschool earn more and are jailed less often than their counterparts who didn't, the study found.

Despite management problems with the program, Detroit will be the site for the National Head Start Association's 33rd annual Training Conference in May. One program that Scales, a regional representative with the association, can tout at the national Head Start meeting is the Male Academy that her staff and parents conceived two years ago.

The program, one of a kind in Michigan, is now in its second year and accommodates 50 boys in an open and frenetic classroom at the New Calvary Center, which is part of New Calvary Baptist Church. It is part of a larger program that includes coed classrooms for 89 preschoolers.

The person who cleaned up the mess last week when a boy's stomach rejected his jambalaya lunch was a man. The one who straightened the boys' ties on business attire day was a man. All five teachers and most of the support staff are male.

Jaylen Ford, 4, jumped from his seat at the Male Academy last week in response to a challenge to recite a poem.

"I'm unique!" the preschooler announced to the nine other boys sitting at his table. "I come from kings and queens. When you look at me, what do you see? I'm proud to be me," he recited.

Jaylen's teacher, Joseph Ruffin, 32, started volunteering with Head Start as a parent. As an assistant teacher, he fills in the void for boys who don't see their fathers every day.

"I'm not necessarily being their father, but showing them what a man can be," he said.

Single mom Wynter Robertson, 22, has a son at the Male Academy and a 2-year-old daughter in Early Head Start. She said she feels lucky she got her son into the program after a month on a waiting list that includes hundreds of families waiting for their chance at a Head Start success story.

"Head Start has been a big help in my life," she said. "I love it."

Contact **CHASTITY PRATT** at 313 -223-4537 or [pratt@freepress.com](mailto:pratt@freepress.com)

### **How to enroll**

- Families must meet income requirements to qualify for Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

Enrollment applications for next year are already available.

For information on enrollment, contact Detroit's Department of Human Services at 313-852-5621 or Detroit Public Schools at 313-866-0533.

*CHASTITY PRATT*

# Cold walk helps pay heat bills

Tuesday, February 17, 2006

By Cedric Ricks

cricks@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8557

William Westra had fallen behind on his Consumers Energy bill last year when he turned to the Kalamazoo County Community Action Bureau for help.

Westra had open heart surgery five years ago, and doctors discovered that his spine was deteriorating. A truck driver, the 41-year-old Comstock Township resident was forced to go on disability.

Making ends meet has been tough, and Michigan winters, even a relatively mild one like this season, are difficult without electricity, Westra said.

He says he hopes many Kalamazoo area residents will turn out for the 13th Walk for Warmth fundraiser set for 9 a.m. Saturday starting at First Baptist Church, 315 W. Michigan Ave., in Kalamazoo. Participants walk up to three miles.

Participants will raise money by walking a three-mile route near downtown. They have collected pledges from sponsors.

Last year, Walk for Warmth raised about \$12,000 and helped 14 low- and moderate-income individuals or families pay utility bills, said Barbara Young, executive director of the Kalamazoo County Community Action Bureau.

That fundraiser is what allowed the bureau to pay Westra's energy bill of \$445 last year.

"If it wasn't for them, I don't know what I would have done," Westra said. "Being on a fixed income, you've only got so much money to put toward your bills."

"These people helped me," he said. "It was a big relief."

The walk is being coordinated by the Kalamazoo County Community Action Board. Funds raised will be matched through a grant from the Michigan Community Action Association.

Young said organizers of this year's Walk for Warmth hope to raise \$50,000.

Noreen Reardon, social services program manager for Kalamazoo County Community Action Bureau, said her agency uses money from Walk for Warmth to assist residents who might not meet assistance guidelines for other programs.

She said residents needing help with energy bills are usually first referred to agencies such as the Kalamazoo County Department of Human Services and the Salvation Army.

"This is the fund we are going to use when other grants run out," Reardon said, referring to Walk for Warmth money.

Last year, the average residential natural gas bill during the winter season was about \$128 per month, according to Judy Palnau, spokesperson for the Michigan Public Service Commission. But this year, even with milder temperatures in January, the statewide average residential natural gas bill will be about \$194 per month, she said.



# Cline gets 25-40 years

STACY LANGLEY, The Huron Daily Tribune

02/14/2006

**BAD AXE** — Stephen H. Cline was laughing and joking Monday afternoon as he sat on the edge of his seat inside the Huron County Circuit Courtroom — until Huron County Circuit Court Judge M. Richard Knoblock took to the bench. Then Cline had nothing to say about kidnapping and abusing his blind and diabetic wife throughout the course of their marriage.

In late December a jury heard the case against Cline, finding him guilty on one count of kidnapping and 17 counts of abuse of a vulnerable adult, his former wife Linda Danks Cline of Pigeon.

On Monday when Cline returned to Circuit Court for sentencing on the 18 charges, he didn't offer an excuse or apology when given the opportunity by Knoblock to address the court.

Instead, Cline remained silent and appeared nervous as he stood next to his Bad Axe Attorney Douglas Lee.

Before hearing what his client's sentence would be, Lee briefly went through where Cline scored in the sentencing guidelines which are used to determine how many years Cline should serve for his crimes.

Lee argued that the score in one instance was incorrect. He felt the points given to Cline for use of a weapon in the case should be recalculated since a plastic bag is not described specifically as a weapon.

Huron County Chief Assistant Prosecutor Stephen J. Allen disagreed, saying any object can be used as a weapon if used to harm someone.

Knoblock agreed with Allen, feeling that the plastic bag in fact was used as a weapon by Cline to suffocate his wife, saying the bag was no different in this case than the use of a knife or a gun would be.

Todd A. Kloska, probation/parole agent who calculated Cline's score, recommended a sentence using Department of Corrections guidelines of 18 to 30 years in prison for the charge of kidnapping. But Knoblock told Cline he felt in this case a minimum sentence of 18 years wasn't long enough considering the fact he's only 43 years old.

Knoblock said he felt there were sufficient reasons to depart from the sentencing guidelines in this case, considering the severity of the crime and taking into consideration Cline's age and public safety when he would get out of prison.

Knoblock instead sentenced Cline to serve a minimum sentence of 25 years in prison and a maximum of 40 years for the kidnapping charge. He was ordered to spend a minimum of 10 years but not more than 15 years in prison for the charges of abuse of a vulnerable adult. He was given credit for 241 days he's already served in the Huron County Jail. Cline also must pay \$1,520 to Linda Danks Cline, and more than \$4,000 in other fines and fees.

Cline and Lee declined to comment on the sentence Monday.

Huron County Prosecutor Mark J. Gaertner said he's pleased with the outcome. "This was a just sentence," he said.

Before Cline was sentenced by Knoblock Allen asked for a departure from the guidelines, asking Knoblock to give Cline a much more harsh sentence.

“I’m glad we argued for a departure from guidelines — 25 to 40 (years in prison) is in line with what a defendant would serve in a second-degree murder case. Keep in mind the penalty on the kidnapping/secret confinement (sentence) is life or any term of years (in prison),” Gaertner said. “What we want is the judge to set a term of years. Mr. Cline now must at least serve the minimum sentence of 25 years in prison before he’ll ever come up for parole. Cline has been turned over to the Michigan Department of Corrections to begin serving his prison term.

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# Cut off Katrina gravy train until money is accounted for Bush pushes spending without plan, accountability

*February 16*

*Detroit News Editorial*

The Bush administration has failed post-Katrina rebuilding as badly as it bobbled rescuing flood victims waving from rooftops. Some \$100 billion has been earmarked for hurricane relief, but there's still no comprehensive rebuilding plan or accountability for money spent.

New Orleans, where attention is focused, squabbles over its future but nothing much can be done until the federal government decides issues, including the future of flood protection and levees.

The Big Easy and other ravaged areas drift through a bureaucratic Twilight Zone, as do hundreds of thousands of dislocated people, many of whom still lack basic needs such as housing.

Victims' hotel payments were cut off this month even though the Federal Emergency Management Agency's \$4 billion trailer program is way behind. Of 135,000 requests for trailers from families, just over half have been filled, according to published reports.

Much of the relief money has been squandered in a sea of fraud and bad faith. One scam artist, for example, used 15 different Social Security numbers to bilk FEMA out of \$41,000. Three of the addresses used by the applicant don't even exist.

"Emergency" purchases on FEMA debit cards given to displaced residents included a \$1,100 diamond ring, a \$450 tattoo and a \$1,000 trip to a Louisiana casino, according to the General Accountability Office.

President Bush pushed massive hurricane relief in hopes of recovering from the political hit he got from bungled FEMA rescue efforts. But he is also obligated to see that the money is well spent.

The flood photo ops are past, and so is the time to begin responsible rebuilding. Only about a third of New Orleans' residents have returned to the city, many sleeping on a relative's couch.

Neither the city nor Louisiana's state government has been effective in cutting red tape to speed up routine matters such as electrical inspections on refurbished homes. Permits take weeks.

And federal officials say local governments are resisting the placement of the federal trailers for homeless residents within their borders. State and local governments have to step up to the crisis.

A lot of evacuees have delayed their return until they know the size of the federal commitment to upgrading levees. The new hurricane season, four months away, will be another severe one, meteorologists say. Flood protection has to be adequate.

But the federal role in recovering from hurricanes Katrina and Rita cannot be unlimited. The White House rightly rejected a post-Katrina plan from U.S. Rep. Richard Baker, R-La. He wants to create a corporation to buy homes from residents who don't want to rebuild. Flaws include an unlimited price tag. But in rejecting good-faith ideas, Bush should not leave a vacuum.

Taxpayer money can't keep flowing into the region without some accountability for how it's being spent. The potential is for billions of dollars to be wasted, while the people it's intended to help continue to suffer.

Americans are generous and don't mind helping in a crisis. But they don't like getting bilked and expect their tax dollars to be wisely spent and properly accounted for.

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## **Hike in minimum wage will hurt U.S. workers**

Not only will raising the minimum wage fail to solve the problems of the poor, it will hurt the very people it is promoted to help. According to the U.S. Labor Department:

"The proportion of hourly paid workers earning the prevailing federal minimum wage or less has trended downward since 1979." The overall U.S. trend has been toward higher wages and per capita income for all Americans.

"About half of workers earning \$5.15 or less were under age 25, and slightly more than one-fourth were age 16-19." A substantial portion of minimum wage earners are not poor, but represent other demographic groups, such as middle-class teenagers.

"The likelihood of a worker being paid the minimum wage or less is inversely related to the level of education attained." As people gain skills, their wages rise.

Most mainstream economists agree that an increase in the minimum wage will eliminate jobs for lower-skilled citizens. A more targeted and cost-effective strategy would be to offer job-training programs for the poor. Alas, one searches the Web site of minimum-wage advocate Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice in vain for information about such practical programs for the poor. This perspective won't gain much traction with minimum-wage supporters because their passion is rooted in the political left's desire to reclaim power, and not promote truth. The truth is that while our society becomes more prosperous, our economic ideas have room for improvement.

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